

ON ELIZABETHAN KEYBOARD MUSIC
AND ITS ENJOYMENT. 1.



Recent years have seen a remarkable revival of interest in music of the Tudor period. Enthusiasts, animated by love and expert knowledge, have brought to light and deciphered long neglected manuscripts. Other musicians, hearing the music, have come to love it, even if they could not give reasons for the faith that was in them. Individual members of the public, however, with no time for expert study and only occasional opportunities for hearing Tudor music, have found it a little strange on a first encounter. Prepared to enjoy, they have yet lacked the clues which would lead them to do so.

This is specially the case with the keyboard music, which is expressed in forms and terms very frugal compared with those of today. Yet it is precisely this keyboard music which is most readily accessible to the majority of musicians. Not everyone can hope to hear the great Tudor choral works performed adequately and frequently. The smaller vocal ensembles, the Madrigals and Motets, call for several intelligent singers, and even gramophone records when available, only represent a handful of the reality, a few pebbles out of a superb quarry. The piano on the other hand, pervades the world. To many people it may be the main avenue of approach to the Tudor music. To provide some clues along that way is the design of these articles.

In Victorian times Tudor music was regarded as about 75 per cent Antiquarian in its interest, 15 per cent artistic, (of the 'quite good for an Englishman's sort) and 10 per cent unaccountable ~~per cent unaccountable~~ by reason of the spacious rhythms and strange clashing notes known as ' false relations ' which the Elizabethans used freely but which set shuddering Mendelssohnians to work with ^a corrective pencil ^{to force} ~~forcing~~ the subtle rhythms into foursquare bars and obliterating those " crudenesses " of progression which are now acknowledged as ' shrewdnesses. ' - ~~reaching after things that lay long ahead.~~ Today the progress of events has

brought men nearer to Elizabethan thought than at any time in the 300 years that lie between. Musicians are again dominated by questionings and adventurous ideals. Now, as then, the confines of knowledge are being rapidly pushed back, and in the music of the Tudor period British composers have found an inspiration towards that truly national school of composition so ~~constantly~~ ^{long needed.} sought. The Tudor and Georgian composers form the complement to each other. Men of today can go back to the Elizabethans, and find in them the home of their ideals: ~~and~~ the Elizabethans, could they come to London ^{now,} ~~today,~~ would find in Georgian music the fulfilment of those harmonic conquests which beckoned their thoughts as ^{surely} ~~strongly~~ as the New World called to Raleigh, Drake, and Hawkins.

This Tudor music then is part of the stuff of today, but is its value absolute or relative? In choral music it is absolute, for the choral works present the final perfection of a type built up through long centuries of artistic endeavour. Composers ~~of to-day~~ wishing to write pure choral music can study under no finer ^{models} ~~masters~~ than the great men of the Tudor period, Tallis, Tye, Taverner, Whyte, Byrd, Gibbons, ^{and} ~~of~~ the galaxy of Madrigalian writers. Their music may not have the suavity of perfection which characterises ~~the famous Italians - notably,~~ Palestrina, - but its sturdy independence and austerity are peculiarly sympathetic to the Character of the English speaking nations.

Relative Value is however the category into which ^{The} ~~1~~ Tudor Instrumental Music falls, for it represents the beginning, not the end, of an era, All is experimental. Composers do not ~~go to~~ ^{now go}

the Elizabethans now to learn how to write piano works, but to see how the Elizabethans themselves ~~began to learn~~, and in learning, led the way to a new domain of Art. Yet, they were long denied the honours of explorers. Even so great an authority as Sir Hubert Parry describes the French ~~especially Couperin~~ as the ' first nation to make a successful mark ' in works for the harpsichord and clavichord; and elsewhere (in his volume of the Oxford History of Music) refers to the earlier Tudor Virginal Music as ' a very singular parenthesis,' though he adds that while Sweelinck and Frescobaldi contributed their share to the music of the lesser keyed instruments commonly known as the cembalo in Italy, and the virginals in England, it was in the latter country that music for domestic keyed instruments was specially cultivated about that time.

Later discoveries have shown that England was less isolated in Elizabethan times than had been supposed, - her artists in closer touch with those of other countries. It is now ^{certain} clear that the English Virginal music of the period was not a ' parenthesis ', but the parent stem from which ^{sprang} modern artistic treatment of keyboard music ~~has sprung~~. (See ' Les Origines de la Musique de Clavier en Angleterre' by M Charles Van Den Borren, 1912)

So interdependent are the aesthetic and historical values of this old keyboard music that a knowledge of the latter is almost inseparable from an enjoyment of the former. Therefore to ^{state} ~~trace~~ the historical situation first. The period to be considered roughly coincides with the reigns of King Henry the Seventh, Henry the Eighth, Queen Elizabeth, and ~~her cousin Mary Queen of Scots' son~~.

James I - that is to say from about 1500 to 1625, or 1630 at a liberal estimate. At the beginning of that era England was practically a mediaeval country: her poetry still in the crucible, her music dominated by the church. At its close she was to all intents and purposes modern. Her rulers and statesmen had learnt to think in hemispheres, her sailors had circumnavigated the world, the Renaissance and Reformation had remade the nation, her Pilgrims had colonized the New World, her poetry had risen to a grandeur never surpassed in history. Had the technique of composition been as advanced then as the art of words, had it been as perfect a tool in the hands of her composers as the language was in the hands of the poets, her music would have been of incomparable splendour. But only in pure choral art were the means commensurate to the men who employed them. Their keyboard music must be judged as much by what they attempted as by what they achieved and more by the thought than its expression.

I
James - that is to say from about 1500 to 1630 at a liberal computation, and our knowledge of its keyboard composers - or rather their compositions - depends for ^{The greater part} ~~more than a century~~ of that time upon a few choice manuscript collections made by or for some special lovers of music.

There is a strange fascination in tracing the story. First come the shadowy years when Henry vii, crafty and cool as a statesman, but an enthusiast for art, was planning his magnificent Chapel in Westminster Abbey, which has well been called music in stone. About the same time, and almost unnoticed among his subjects a certain composer named Hugh Aston (c. 1500 - 1520) was laying the foundations of piano music with a Hornpipe! This, the earliest known English piece for the Virginals, occurs in one of the Royal MSS kept at the British Museum, and there seems reason to think that other pieces in the same volume may be by him.

Aston

After Aston there came a gap, as far as written music is concerned of 20 or 30 years, the next landmark being the 'Mulliner Book' made about 1545. In a way this did not mark much progress, for the pieces it contains are nearly all vocal compositions arranged for keyboard instruments. Like still water it mirrored its immediate surroundings. Nevertheless the volume ~~bound in brown leather~~ stamped with the Tudor rose, portcullis, fleur de lys, and bearing the initials of Henry viii contains many things that are of interest among them compositions by ~~such Tudor giants as~~ Tye, Tallis, and Taverner, while the name of Blythman also appears, - Blythman, ~~who must~~ ^{had for his pupil} that famous Dr. John Bull, the greatest ~~of~~ keyboard virtuoso of Elizabethan days. Mulliner, who gave his name to the book and in whose handwriting it probably is, was Master of the Choir at old St. Paul's.

As ~~the~~ years passed interest in keyboard music intensified. Some of the credit ^{must go} ~~for this is due~~ to Henry viii. A monarch is not often a musician but Henry ~~viii~~ exhibited that

~~often a musician, but Henry VIII exhibited that rare combination,~~
 and besides composing, played well on several instruments, the
 Virginals among them. ~~Also~~ ^{also} ~~He had~~ ^{He} evidently saw to it that his
 daughters (afterwards Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth) learnt to
 play well. The example of these sovereigns ~~and their first-hand~~
~~knowledge~~ did much to shape subsequent events, and secured for key-
 board music an honourable esteem it might otherwise have lacked.

The years separating the Mulliner Book from the next
 manuscript monument ' My Lady ^{NEVELL'S} ~~Nevell's~~ Booke ' (1591) were some
 of the richest in adventure and poetry that England ever knew.
 Musicians glowed with answering enthusiasm and genius. Byrd, Gibbons
 all the fine Elizabethan composers were fast approaching the zenith
 of their powers, and under their hands keyboard music developed in-
 to a distinct branch of the art, with ^{embryonic} ~~many of the~~ characteristics
^{modern} of instrumental style. ~~If these appear embryonic,~~ The wonder is not
 that they were undeveloped, but that they were there at all. ~~Other~~
~~countries had nothing comparable to them at that time.~~ ^{at the same} ' Lady ~~Neve~~
 Nevell's Booke' shows William Byrd, the greatest of the Elizabethans,
 in the full exercise of his powers, ~~for~~ It is practically a Byrd
 anthology, and contains 42 pieces by him, among them the charming
 'Carman's Whistle.' ~~There is a~~ ^{has it} Tradition [^] that this 'Booke' (trans-
 cribed by his fervent admirer John Baldwin) was designed by Byrd as
 a present to his scholar Lady Nevell.

Next in date stands the delightful volume known as 'Benjamin
 Cosyn's Virginal Book' _ circa 1600 - 1610. Cosyn was a composer
 himself and one guesses ~~that~~ this collection was for his own use.

It is beautifully written and contains nearly one hundred works, over ninety being for keyed instruments. Byrd is slightly represented, but the collection is rich in works by Dr. John Bull, the daring keyboard composer already mentioned, and ^{The grave} Orlando Gibbons ~~the grave~~, has some beautiful things in the older style. A Selection of Twenty-Five Pieces ~~edited by~~ from this book edited by Fuller Maitland and Barclay Squire has lately been published by J.W. Chester, 11. Great Marlborough Street, London, W. ^{Fresh paragraph} About the time Cosyn closed his collection, a volume was begun which is now the most famous of all collections, - that ~~which is~~ known as the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. For richness, variety, and interest its contents surpass all others, and it is practically the criterion by which we judge ~~the~~ English ~~school of~~ Virginal music. There is pathos about its origin, ^{Since} ~~for~~ it was probably compiled by Francis Tregian who was for many years a prisoner in the Fleet on a charge of recusancy. ^{Of it} ~~It contains~~ 297 compositions, nearly all of ~~which~~ are by English composers, ^{only} ~~though~~ a handful of foreign works ^{being} ~~and~~ included, and the compilation probably covered the years 1608-1618. Here are the ^{maturest} ~~maturest~~, and most daring pieces of Byrd and Bull, ~~and~~ delicious little ^{things} ~~works~~ by Giles Farnaby, ^{that is so romantic} ~~the most romantic of them all~~, besides pieces by Morley, Philips, Tallis, Johnson and many others.

The complete contents, edited by Fuller Maitland and Barclay Squire were ^{published} ~~printed~~ by Breitkopf and Hartel ⁱⁿ ~~1894-99~~, but are now out of print. Some of the pieces however are available in the Selections for Pianoforte from Byrd and Farnaby edited by Professor Bantock and published by Novello & Co. 160 Wardour Street, London. W.

^{Another}
~~One~~ other famous Manuscript Virginal book ^{of this period} exists - that of Will.
 Forster, 1624, devoted mainly to the works of Byrd, Bull and Ward,
 and fourteen pieces by Byrd drawn from this collection and the
 Fitzwilliam Virginal Book have been published by Stainer & Bell ^{Ltd}
 58 Berners Street, London W.

By 1630 conditions had changed. England no longer
 led the world in Virginal music. But in the meantime an event
 occurred which gave the Elizabethan composers a double ^{right to their} title as
 founders of Pianoforte music. William Byrd, John Bull, and Orlando
 Gibbons joined in publishing a little volume of their ^{own} keyboard
 compositions. They called it "Parthenia" ... the first musicke that
 ever was printed for the Virginalls", and ^{appearance} it is about as imposing in
 as a volume by a minor poet, but modest as it looks a copy of the
 original edition today is worth more than its weight in gold.

M.M.S.

On Elizabethan Keyboard Music
and its enjoyment



2

The period during which English keyboard music was significant in relation to ~~the~~ general musical history began about the year 1500 and practically ended about 1630. Before that time no keyboard music worthy ~~the~~ name existed. After it the pre-eminence passed from English into foreign hands^{and} The torch lit by the Elizabethans kindled fresh lights abroad, but flickered low itself. Even while the period lasted the process of differentiation was at work. Not only were composers disengaging instrumental from vocal music, but instrumental art was dividing into different branches. Even in keyboard work organ and virginal music, though interchangeable at the start, gradually diverged in style, The Venetians doing most for the former and the English most for the latter. Modern knowledge would be nil, as far as English Virginal music is concerned were it not for a few precious manuscript collections and a small equally valuable printed volume which have survived the passage of centuries. When Mulliner, Cosyn, Tregian, and the others formed their private collections in the days of King Henry viii, Queen Elizabeth, and King James, they would have thought it beyond the wildest dreams of fancy that they would prove the sole links between the art they loved and posterity.

There is a strange fascination in tracing the story. First came the shadowy years when Henry vii, cool and crafty as a statesman, but an enthusiast for art, was planning that magnificent Chapel in Westminster Abbey which has well been called music

in stone. About the same time, and almost unnoticed among his subjects, a certain composer named Hugh Aston (c. 1500-1520) was laying the foundations of pianoforte music with a Hornpipe ! This, the earliest known English piece for the Virginals, occurs in one of the Royal MSS. kept at the British Museum, and exhibits definite features of instrumental style.

After Aston there is a gap, ^{so} ~~as~~ far as written music is concerned, till the next landmark is reached in the " Mulliner " Book " made about 1545 by Thomas Mulliner, Master of the Choir at old St. Paul's. In spite of its interest this volume does not indicate any great advance. The pieces it contains are nearly all vocal compositions ~~arranged for~~ in the ecclesiastical style arranged for keyboard instruments. Like a pool of still water within Cathedral precincts it mirrors its immediate surroundings. Tye, Tallis, and Taverner are among the composers represented, while the name of Blythman also appears ~~4~~ - Blythman who had for his pupil the famous Dr. John Bull, greatest of Elizabethan keyboard ~~players~~ performers.

As years passed interest in Virginal music intensified. Some of the credit for this must go to King Henry VIII. A monarch is not often a musician, but Henry was extraordinarily ~~vers~~ versatile , and besides composing, played well on several instruments including the Virginals. He also saw to it that his daughters (afterwards Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth) became good players. The example of these sovereigns helped to shape subsequent events,

and secured for keyboard music an honourable esteem it might otherwise have lacked.

The years separating the Mulliner Book from the next manuscript monument 'My Lady Nevell's Booke' (1591) were some of the richest in adventure and poetry that England ever knew. Musicians glowed into an answering flame of enthusiasm and genius. Their Virginal music developed into a distinct branch possessing many of the characteristics of the instrumental style. If these appear in an embryonic form, the wonder is not that they were undeveloped but that they were there at all. Other countries had nothing comparable. 'Lady Nevell's Booke' is practically a Byrd anthology for it contains 42 pieces by him, among them the charming 'Carman's Whistle'. Tradition has it that this 'Booke' (transcribed by his fervent admirer John Baldwin) was designed by Byrd as a present to his scholar Lady Nevell and the music shows him in the full exercise of his powers, even if the imagination displayed is not so prophetic as that shown in his later works for strings.

Next in date stands the delightful volume known as 'Benjamin Cosyn's Virginal Book' - circa 1600 - 1610. Cosyn was a composer and one guesses he made this collection for his own use. It is beautifully written and includes one hundred works, over ninety being for keyed instruments. Byrd is scantily represented but the collection is rich in works by Dr. John Bull, the daring keyboard composer already mentioned, and the grave Orlando Gibbons, who has some beautiful things in the older style. A selection of twenty-

five Pieces from this book edited by Fuller Maitland and Barclay Squire has lately been published by J. W. Chester, 11. Great Marlborough Street, London, W.

About this time Cosyn closed his collection, a volume was begun which is now the most famous of all collections, - that known as the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book. For richness, variety, and interest its contents surpass all others, and it is practically the criterion by which all English Virginal Music is judged. There is pathos in its origin, for it was probably compiled by Francis Tregian, a prisoner in the Fleet for many years on a charge of recusancy. It contains 297 compositions. Nearly all are by English composers, though a handful of foreign works are included, and the compilation probably covered the years 1608-1618. Here are the maturest and most daring ~~works~~ pieces of Byrd and Bull, delicious little works by the romantic Giles Farnaby, pieces by Morley, Philips, Tallis, Johnson, Tomkins and many others. Another famous Manuscript Virginal Book is that made by Will. Forster 1624, devoted mainly to the compositions of Byrd, Bull and Ward.

Some of this music is available today in reprints. The Fitzwilliam Book edited by Fuller Maitland and Barclay Squire was published by Messrs. Breitkopf and Hartel between 1894 and 1899, but is now out of print. Some of the pieces however are to be found in the Selections for Pianoforte from Byrd and Farnaby edited by Professor Bantock and published by Novello & Co. 160 Wardour Street, London, and an admirable collection of fourteen pieces by Byrd drawn from the Fitzwilliam and Forster Virginal Books, edited

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By 1630 conditions had changed. England no longer led the world in Virginal music. But in the meantime an event occurred which gave the Elizabethan composers a double right to their title as founders of Pianoforte music. William Byrd, John Bull, and Orlando Gibbons joined in publishing a little volume of their own keyboard compositions. They called it 'Parthenia'...the first musicke that ever was printed for the Virginalls'. Modest as it looks a copy of the original edition today is more precious than gold.

M.M.S.

On ELIZABETHAN KEYBOARD MUSIC

AND ITS ENJOYMENT. - 3.



Elizabethan spelling was notoriously elastic. So long as the right sounds were represented, no one minded how they were arrived at, and you could spell Shakespeare half a dozen different ways. The same sort of feeling cropped out ^{over} ~~in~~ the Elizabethan use of the term 'the Virginals' - or (more ceremoniously) 'a pair of Virginals'. From the time of King Henry the Seventh to nearly the end of the Seventeenth Century all quilled keyboard instruments in England were included under this one name, whether they happened to be the real, rectangular Virginal, the trapeze shaped Harpsichord or the Spinet. This cheerful complaisance gave no qualms to the Elizabethans, ~~but~~ ^{and} ~~it~~ left some speculative loopholes for posterity! However all the instruments for which the Tudor composers wrote were alike in this - they had a ~~very~~ small ~~compass~~ compass and a very small tone compared to that of a modern piano. Hugh Aston's pieces in the reign of Henry the Eighth show a compass of no more than three octaves and a third - (from F to A'') while the instrument known as Queen Elizabeth's Virginal (now in the South Kensington Museum) has a compass of just over four octaves. As to tone, only a handful of people could hear a performance in comfort by gathering close round the performer and listening with all their might, particularly if the instrument ~~should have~~ happened to be a clavichord. In this case "things seen" in the scores must have been "mightier than things heard." There

never ~~was~~ ~~music~~ an art less sensuous in its appeal. Such music was less sound than thought made apparent. Public concerts, had they existed, would have been useless. Virginal music was essentially a domestic art, and even today its chiefest enjoyment is probably gained in the intimacy of ~~the~~ home.

Then ~~the~~ the reader or player may turn over page after page of sweet, quaint music, as clean and fragrant as an old English garden, and will quickly learn to recognize the various ^{types of} ~~ways of work~~ ^{types} that were in vogue in Elizabeth's day. There ~~are~~ ^{were} the pieces that are simply transcriptions of vocal works - Madrigals and such things: then again there ~~are~~ ^{were} the Fantazias in vocal style, but written direct for keyed instruments, often foreshadowing fugal practice, and sometimes wavering into vague ~~florid~~ passages and instrumental figures. The Preludes ~~are~~ ^{were} mostly 'casual runnings up and down the keyboard or equally casual strings of chords'. Then there ~~are~~ ^{were} the sets of Variations - often some well-known tune of the day, or an ecclesiastical plainsong - Variations simple enough in plan but frequently hard to play. Was it not Dr. John Bull's ^{Set of} Variations on Walsingham which completely baffled Mrs Pepusch, good pianist though she was? Then the old Dance Tunes form another, and more attractive class - the Pavans, Almans, Galliardas and such like: not usually very rhythmic but well founded in dignity and design. Lastly the Folk tunes and Fancy pieces, most fascinating of them all. Such delightful Folk tunes as 'The Carman's Whistle', the same composer's 'Bells' or 'Mr. Byrd's Battle', Munday's 'Faire Weather', and ~~such~~ charming bits of self expression

as Farnaby's 'Dream^e' or "Dr. Bulle's Greefe" seem to put one straight into touch with these old composers. ~~One feels~~ ^{It is} as if they were happy children in the spring of music playing with tunes like cowslip balls. ~~And~~ ^Then suddenly one or other of them does something which shows they were not children but grown men, eager artists whose thoughts, lifted by the high passion for perfection, pierced the clouds of the future. Farnaby employing the chord of the ~~thirteenth~~ dominant thirteenth, or John Bull anticipating Equal ^Temperament in his Modulating Fanazia No.51 in the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book, are apt examples.

Any number of musicians composed for the Virginals, but the four greatest in this department were ~~undoubtedly~~ William Byrd (1543 - 1623) John Bull ^{circa} (1560 - 1626) Giles Farnaby ^{circa} (1560 - ~~c.~~ 1600) and Orlando Gibbons (1583 - 1625). Byrd was great in whatever he did. Bull, on the other hand, excelled only in instrumental music; his instinct for 'genuine instrumental effect almost amounted to genius', and his dexterity as an executant was well-nigh fabulous. Even today, with the aid of modern fingering his passages are hard; how he contrived to play them up to pace with the fingering then in vogue is a mystery. The thumb and little finger were scarcely used, the middle ones kept straight and a gliding touch was aimed at, though with the development of the Harpsichord a crisper touch became necessary. It almost looks as if here again Bull had anticipated modern methods, as in the matter of Equal Temperament. ²

Though youngest of the four, Gibbons was in many ways

the most conservative. He usually did his best work when his eyes were turned towards the past and players who have a taste for the grave and pensive will find in him a congenial companion. The D minor Fantazia from Benjamin Cosyn's Virginal Book, is a fine example of his style. It carries with it thoughts which transcend the limitations of his medium.

Giles Farnaby, like Bull, was a West Countryman, and to many people he is the most lovable of all Elizabethan keyboard composers. Who could help loving such an ingenuous, finely sensitive nature as that revealed in his music. And what a pretty choice he had in titles! A composer was bound to do something delightful when he called it 'Rosasolis', 'Daphne', 'Pawles Wharfe', 'Quodling's Delight', 'Woody-Cock' or 'Put up thy dagger Jemy'. And then too what delicate little tone poems are the pieces he called 'Giles Farnaby's Dreame', 'His Rest', and 'His Humour'. First fragile dawn-clouds of the tone ^{poems} pictures of today. ^{There is} More than a hint of the modern world too, in his brisk rhythms and "tuney" tunes.

Even as England herself is an island, so the work of these Elizabethan Keyboard composers rises like an island in her history. By 1630 artistic attention had shifted to Vocal Ayres, Dialogues and music for Viols, and though for some years the tradition of pre-eminence persisted, the reality had gone.

If looking back today it appears to us that the Elizabethans were over-fond of ornament, over-easily pleased with what now

seem obvious devices, it is only necessary to recall the history of the times to recapture some of the enjoyment the Elizabethans themselves felt. For then keyboard music offered a freedom hitherto unknown. In it one person could play many notes at one time instead of ~~the~~^a succession of single notes, (which are all a singer can produce), and the Virginal player also had the ~~new~~^{fresh} joy of speed. Long quick scale passages, flashing arpeggios, massed chords - there is nothing wonderful in these ~~but~~ now, but to the Tudor composers who first used them they must have seemed as strange and rare as a flock of Birds of Paradise, newly found and thrilling to domesticate.

M.M.S.